

AFRO YAQUI MUSIC COLLECTIVE

A promotional image for a music collective. It features three women in the foreground. The woman on the left is a Black woman with a shaved head, wearing a red and black patterned scarf. The woman in the center is a white woman with long dark hair, wearing a black off-the-shoulder top and a feathered headpiece. The woman on the right is a white woman wearing a black jacket and a headscarf, with her right fist raised. The background is a vibrant watercolor wash in shades of blue, purple, and pink, with two large butterflies (one monarch-like) visible. The text is overlaid on the image.

M I R R O R
B U T T E R F L Y

*THE MIGRANT LIBERATION
MOVEMENT SUITE*

Get ready for revelation! Mirror Butterfly: The Migrant Liberation Movement Suite is an epic jazz opera spanning four continents and five centuries. The opera is a tribute to the resistance of migrants to the destruction of ecologies, economies, and cultures unleashed by slavery, conquest, and colonization—in short, a history of capitalism from the point of view of women warriors from Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. A trinity of revolutionary women converge to tell stories of migration, singing a Sermon on the Mount to bring down Babylon.


The plot of *Mirror Butterfly* is inspired by “The Story of the Sword,” a Maya parable shared with us by the Zapatista autonomous schools. The story symbolizes the centuries-long Maya resistance to the conquest and Indigenous genocide through avatars of a tree, a stone, and water. In their story, a sword (representing the conquest) cuts down a tree (Maya society). The tree transforms into a rock, which is underground and still; but the sword hacks at it and shatters it, though not without damage. Finally, the stone transforms into water, which the sword is unable to resist. The sword rusts and withers away in this eternal elemental. The water symbolizes the flourishing grassroots-organizing of indigenous communities and their allies in contemporary Mexico. The lesson of the tale is that we shall live to see an indigenous-centric Mexico and, indeed, an entire world.



*Azize
Aslan*

*Reyna
Lourdes
Anguamea*

*Charlotte
Hill O'Neal
("Mama C")*



In *Mirror Butterfly*, the metaphors of resistance—the tree, stone and water—are expanded to include voices from the African diaspora and the Middle East. These characters are collaborative creations; their personalities and words are based on testimonies of living activists based in Tanzania, Syrian Kurdistan, and the Yaqui nation in Mexico. In this work, the “Mulberry Tree” channels both the life mission of **Mama C**, and centuries of pan-African communalistic philosophies that have always pushed back against the savage slavery perpetrated by Middle Passage capitalism. The “Stoneflower” character captures the spirit and theory of the matriarchal, revolutionary Kurdish movement, based in Rojava, Syria, to which we have **Azize Aslan** to thank. Finally, the water in this story takes on the form of a nearly extinct butterfly named the Kautesamai. Here we return to Indigenous Mexico via **Reyna Lourdes Anguamea**’s contributions. Reyna is a Yaqui-Mexican lawyer and cultural guardian, and she was the interlocutor for the development of the Butterfly/Water character, who brings the three avatars together.

Mirror Butterfly also has supporting characters: a supernatural deer who functions as the narrator, and a mushroom chorus that symbolizes popular movements from below. These characters all resist The Sword—whose ethos embodies what Karl Marx called “Primitive Accumulation,” what Marie Mies called “Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale,” and what Joel Kovel called “The Enemy of Nature.” You will hear a Kovelesque rendition of corporate egotism on Track 4, “Overture of the Sword,” and the sword remains a presence throughout. His destructive streak unmasks the origins of climate catastrophe, and reveals the scale of our planetary predicament. The Sword—which is patriarchy itself—confronts matriarchy, while a subterranean chorus of mushrooms (heard first in Track 3 as the choir) prefigures a rhizomatic resistance.

With a buoyant blend of Maya and millenarian mythologies, ecosocialist analysis, and Afro-Asian-Amerindian jazz instrumentation, the *Migrant Liberation Movement Suite* reweaves Pangea. In the music, destiny reaches its denouement: Africa, America and Asia unite – aligned by their three avatar sisters, the Mulberry Tree, Stone Flower, and Kautemesia. The Sword is overcome and undone. The sacred hoop is rewoven. Listen close—there is more than meets the ear.

~Quincy Saul, Ecosocialist Horizons

The following pages will include excerpts of the libretto. The full libretto can be found at:
<http://afroyaquimusiccollective.com/mirror-butterfly/>

SCENE I:
**MUSHROOM OVERTURE: HOW THE SWORD
BECAME A SWORD**

(TRACKS 1-4)

Energies and minerals (sounded by a saxophone quartet) combine to form mushrooms and a sword. The mushrooms work collaboratively as they grow, but the sword picks a fight. The sword boasts that he can destroy everything in his path. He starts giving power and wealth to whoever wields him, and death to whoever defies. The sword annihilates nature, fertility, and homesteads. Fallen trees are cut into slaveboats and sold to faraway lands, weighed down with tears in stormy oceans. From the wreckage, mushrooms continue to grow, bringing nutrients and warning the trees of deforestation. This is the song of their resistance.



“You were once a rebel lashing out against the gods of gold and superiority by deceit, reckless cruelty half-asleep. Trading one overlord for the next. But there is a rebellion deeper, slower, to make your own authority--beyond the reach of the state. Or did you want this siege of lies and bullies? Are you willing to have your own way?”

-Deer, challenging us to remember our mission.

SCENE 2:
PANTHER TREE / ORCHID MANTIS
(STORY OF COLORS AND NIGHT AIR)

(TRACKS 5-8)

The sword strikes a mulberry tree who is full of birds. The tree fights - mantis style - camouflaged with orchids and thistles. The tree bursts into colors when the sword strikes hard through her branches and nearly topples her into exile.

“Give the land to those who work the land.”

-Mulberry Tree, channeling Emiliano Zapata and countless other revolutionaries.



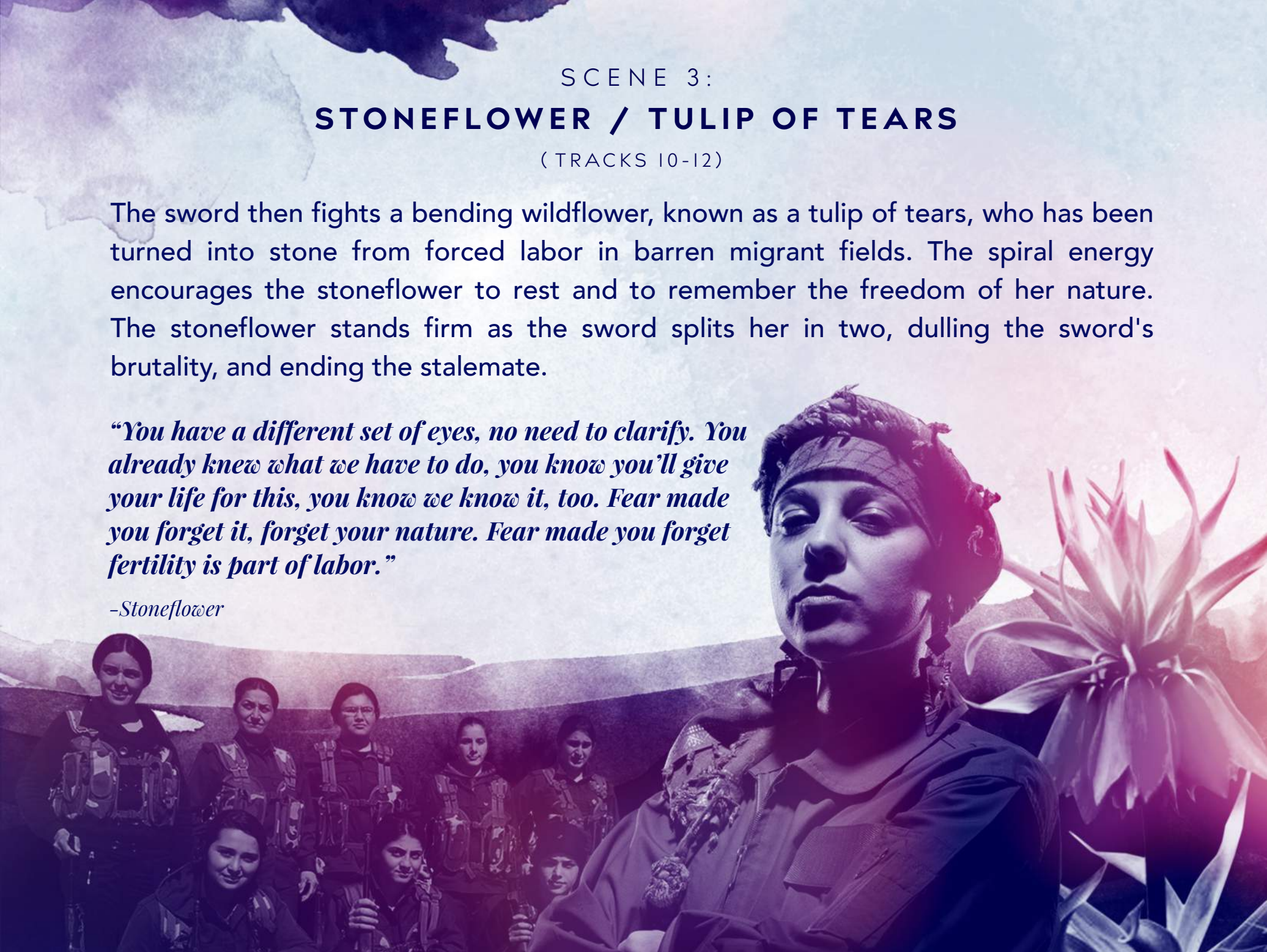
SCENE 3:
STONEFLOWER / TULIP OF TEARS

(TRACKS 10-12)

The sword then fights a bending wildflower, known as a tulip of tears, who has been turned into stone from forced labor in barren migrant fields. The spiral energy encourages the stoneflower to rest and to remember the freedom of her nature. The stoneflower stands firm as the sword splits her in two, dulling the sword's brutality, and ending the stalemate.

“You have a different set of eyes, no need to clarify. You already knew what we have to do, you know you’ll give your life for this, you know we know it, too. Fear made you forget it, forget your nature. Fear made you forget fertility is part of labor.”

-Stoneflower

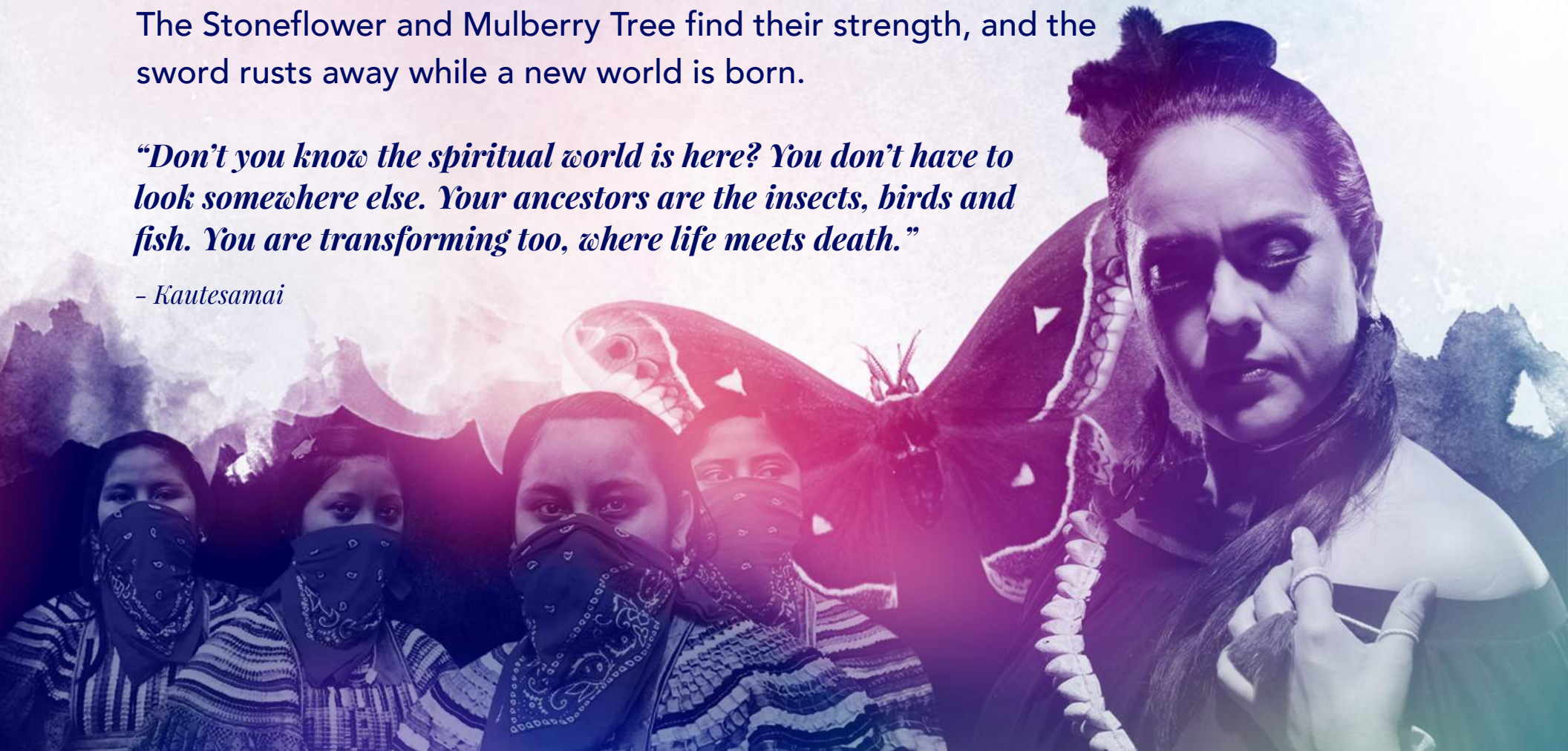


SCENE 4:
FOUR-MIRRORED BUTTERFLY
(TRACKS 13-17)

The damaged stone and tree make their way to a river to regrow, only to find the waterways poisoned by the sword. They call to water for guidance, and the water rises up as a four-mirrored butterfly, an endangered and sacred insect in Yaqui culture: the **Kautesamai**. This water defender slowly wraps itself around the sword. The Stoneflower and Mulberry Tree find their strength, and the sword rusts away while a new world is born.

“Don’t you know the spiritual world is here? You don’t have to look somewhere else. Your ancestors are the insects, birds and fish. You are transforming too, where life meets death.”

- Kautesamai



Afro Yaqui Music Collective is a postcolonial big band dedicated to activating the histories of resistance and collaboration between African diasporic and Indigenous peoples. Within our journeys the voices of pan-Asian revolutionaries and working class allies have also added to this chorus, which celebrates the radical legacies of Maroon Societies—multiethnic societies built by escaped slaves who fled the plantation to build a new world based on cooperative labor and uncompromised freedom. The group has performed at the Kennedy Center, the ASCAP jazz awards, Lincoln Center, Red Rooster, protests at the U.S.-Mexican border, fundraisers for families of state-executed Black youth, and ecosocialist gatherings in Mexico, Cuba, Kurdish Iraq, and Venezuela, among others. Author Robin D.G. Kelley has described the group's music as "joyful music that swings and sings and sometimes stings but always keeps us dancing toward freedom." The band collaborated with poetic-playwright Ruth Margraff and choreographer Peggy Myo-Young Choy, in dialogue with three revolutionary women from Kurdistan, Mexico, and Tanzania, to generate the jazz opera on this album. Choy worked with dancers Albert Du, Weylin Gomez, Trevor Miles and Kelsey Robinson in the staged version of this work, with Cynthia Croot directing.

Afro Yaqui Music Collective came into being out of a collaboration between saxophonist Ben Barson (ASCAP-award winning composer and protégé of the great Fred Ho) and Gizelxanath Rodriguez (Yaqui-Mexican soprano) who combined to form a group based on music. Over the years, Hugo Cruz (Cuba), Samuel Boateng (Ghana), Beni

Rossmann (Pittsburgh), Nejma Nefertiti and Bernard Grobman (New York), Ben Opie, Kelsey Robinson, and Roger Romero (Pittsburgh), Yang Jin (China/Pittsburgh) Aidana Yntykbayeva (Kazakhstan) and dozens of others have collaborated with the collective.



Special Thanks to Innova Director, Philip Blackburn; Operations Director: Chris Campbell; and Publicist, Tim Igel. Innova is supported by an endowment from the McKnight Foundation.

Find more at afroyaquimusiccollective.com

"Returns jazz back to its real roots—to the earth, to the sky, to the women who produced and protected a people's culture."

~Robin D.G. Kelley, author, *Freedom Dreams: the Black Radical Imagination*



M I R R O R B U T T E R F L Y

THE MIGRANT LIBERATION MOVEMENT SUITE

- 1 ENTER THE MIRRORS
- 2 INTERLUDE
- 3 OVERTURE OF THE MUSHROOM
- 4 OVERTURE OF THE SWORD
- 5 INTERLUDE
- 6 MULBERRY TREE
- 7 ORCHID MANTIS
- 8 MULBERRY TREE (REPRISE)
- 9 INTERLUDE
- 10 ATTACK OF THE DRONE
- 11 THE WORKERS' MARCH
- 12 STONEFLOWER REQUIEM
- 13 THE FOUR MIRRORED BUTTERFLY
- 14 THE SISTERS UNITE
- 15 THE SWORD DISSOLVES
- 16 THE RISING SUN
- 17 A STONE AGAINST TIME

LEAD VOCALS: Kelsey Robinson (Track 6-8), Nejma Nefertiti (Track 11-12), Gizelxanath Rodriguez (Track 13-16), Marina Celander (voice actor), Drew Bayura (voice actor)

CHORUS: Morgan Hawkins, Jason Gordon, Katharine Carlson, Gizelxanath Rodriguez

SAXOPHONES: Ben Opie, Patrick Breiner, Roger Romero, Ben Barson

STRINGS: Jin Yang (Pipa), Aidana Yntykbayeva (Kobyz), Claudia Quintana (Violin), Ahmer'e Blackman (Cello)

RHYTHM SECTION: Beni Rossman (Bass), Samuel Okoh-Boateng (Keyboard), Seth Yoder (Keyboard), Bernard Grobman (Guitar), Brian Riordan (Electronics)

PERCUSSION: Julian Powell, Hugo Cruz, Jeff Berman

CONDUCTOR: Federico Garcia-De Castro

Composed by Benjamin Barson

Libretto by Ruth Margraff with contributions by Nejma Nefertiti (Track 7-8)

Choreography by Peggy Myo-Young Choy

Mixed by Malcolm Inglis

Mastered by Boone McElroy

Recorded live by Angela Bauman, at the New Hazlett Theater in Pittsburgh, PA

ALBUM DESIGN: sarah huny young for SCDA.co